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Using Soccer to Kick Out Extremism



Photo Credit: USAID-ASI-East

A soccer tournament in Paktika, south-eastern Afghanistan, engages youth vulnerable to indoctrination

Youth belonging to the various tribes of Paktika province in south-eastern Afghanistan participated in a soccer tournament facilitated by USAID's Afghanistan Stabilization Initiative-East project. The three-day event was organized to engage youth vulnerable to indoctrination by anti-government elements. According to the United Nations' National Joint Youth Program, 68% of the Afghan population is under 25 years old. But unemployment rates estimated to be as high as 40% aggravate

young Afghans' disaffection. "Radicalizing" influences, particularly from across the border in Pakistan, capitalize on their vulnerability. One participant said, "I wish there was no war so we could have this kind of competition every day instead."

The tournament, which drew an audience of 600, was unprecedented because it briefly united Paktika's disparate tribes. Its success can be gauged by the request of some fractious tribes in Paktika's Barmal district that their youth be included in future tournaments. The tournament allowed the Afghan government to conduct a dialogue with local community leaders.